

Sinclair Broadcasting's decision to force their stations to air an anti-Kerry documentary days before the election is a clear example of the dangers of media consolidation.

I must question whether the extraordinary decision to force stations to carry the film violates FCC requirements that broadcasts provide equal time for electoral candidates. This is exactly the sort of use of public airwaves to promote station owners' private political agendas that federal regulations have always been designed to prevent. "American thought and American politics will be largely at the mercy of those who operate these stations," Rep. Luther Johnson warned at the time of the passage of the Radio Act of 1927.

Sinclair has a record of allowing its conservative agenda to influence its programming decisions. For instance, in April, Sinclair ordered seven of its ABC-affiliated stations not to air an episode of Nightline that featured the names of American soldiers killed in Iraq, saying, "We do not believe such political statements should be disguised as news content." This is a program that I very much wanted to view...to honor those who have given their lives for the very freedoms that were suppressed by refusing to air the program.

Sinclair uses the public airwaves free of charge, and is obligated by law to serve the public interest. But when large companies control the airwaves, we get more of what's good for the bottom line and less of what we need for our democracy. Instead of something produced at "News Central" far away, it's more important that we see real people from our own communities and more substantive news about issues that matter.

Sinclair's actions show why we need to strengthen media ownership rules, not weaken them. They show why the license renewal process needs to involve more than a returned postcard. Thank you.